HOW DO SOCIAL VENTURES EMERGE? EVIDENCE FROM A 24 MONTH LONG, WEEKLY TRACKING STUDY (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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INTERACTIVE PAPER SESSION

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EVIDENCE FROM A 24 MONTH LONG, WEEKLY TRACKING STUDY

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Principal Topic

There is a small but growing academic literature on social entrepreneurship, but little is known of the patterns of ‘becoming’ of a social enterprise, and what social entrepreneurs actually do during the process of new social venture creation. What we know is gleaned from the memories of successful social entrepreneurs, often many years after startup. In this study, we report patterns of emergence of one social enterprise as recorded (almost) weekly over two years in real time by the founder. Data is available from completion of the first business plan through the first six months of service delivery to clients of the enterprise. The venture concept was an after-schools activities programme with a vision of a series of national tournaments.

Method

This study analyses the pattern of the founder’s changing activities, events, roles and networks through 75 separate weekly updates from November 2004 to October 2006 plus additional information such as minutes of meetings and emails, from shortly after completion of the first written business plan through the first six months of services being delivered to the venture’s core clients (high school students). Activities were coded by each of the first three authors using, as an initial guide, the 27 new business organizing events reviewed by Lichtenstein, Dooley and Lumpkin (2006).

Results and Implications

The results cast new light on what social entrepreneurs do, by capturing the growing complexity of activities, events and networks recorded in real time by the venture founder over a two year emergence period of a social enterprise. They reveal an entrepreneur spending a great deal of time learning how to co-opt resource-rich stakeholders to offset the resource-poor nature of his service recipients. Experimenting was a fundamental activity in this emergent period. The results also demonstrate other patterns in social venture emergence, including shifts in founder activity as the organisation grows, the tension between entrepreneurial persistence and bureaucratic delay, and growing professionalization, thus adding to our knowledge of organizational evolution and enabling comparison with the emergence of new business ventures.

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